

Message Text

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16

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

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FM AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2948

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMCONSUL SYDNEY

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

CINCPAC

AMCONSUL PERTH

AMCONSUL BRISBANE

AMCONSUL PORT MORESBY

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PINT, AS

SUBJECT: FURTHER COMMENTS ON TASMANIAN STATE LABOR PARTY
CRISIS

REF: MELBOURNE 1235

1. SUMMARY: LABATT VISITED TASMANIA AUGUST 20TH, 21ST,
AND 22ND TO SPEAK AT MEETINGS OF UNITED SERVICES
INSTITUTE HELD CONSECUTIVELY IN LAUNCESTON AND HOBART.
BOTH MEETINGS WERE SUCCESSFUL; BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY VISIT
PROVIDED OPPORTUNITY TO OBSERVE STATE LABOR PARTY
SCENE WHICH CONTINUES CHAOTIC. TUG OF WAR BETWEEN
FEDERAL ALP LEADERS AND TASMANIAN PARTY ORGANIZATION
HAS PRODUCED MAJOR POLITICAL CASUALTY THROUGH RESIGNATION
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OF TASMANIAN PARTY PRESIDENT, DOUGLAS LOWE, ITS MOST

PROMISING YOUNG LEADER. HOWEVER, LOWE RETAINS HIS POWER
BASE AS DEPUTY PREMIER OF TASMANIA. END SUMMARY

2. TASMANIAN DEPUTY PREMIER, DOUGLAS LOWE, ANNOUNCED
AUGUST 21ST THAT HE HAD RESIGNED HIS POSITION AS
PRESIDENT OF TASMANIA STATE LABOR PARTY BECAUSE OF
PRESSURES FROM BOTH RIGHT AND LEFT WINGS OF PARTY,
CONCERNING HIS ATTEMPTS TO FIND COMPROMISE SOLUTION
BETWEEN FEDERAL AND STATE PARTY POSITIONS ON HARRADINE
AFFAIR. (REFTEL A). LOWE TOLD CONGEN TODAY THAT HIS
ATTEMPTS TO MODERATE BETWEEN FEDERAL PARTY AND STATE
PARTY OFFICERS HAD PLACED HIM IN AN "IMPOSSIBLE POSITION,"
JEOPARDIZING HIS POLITICAL CAREER IN STATE PARLIAMENT.

3. LOWE, ON GOVERNMENT BUSINESS TRIP TO REMOTE AREA,
WAS NOT AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW BY LABATT DURING HIS
VISIT. HOWEVER, TASMANIAN STATE LABOR PARTY SECRETARY,
MRS. KATHERINE VENN, TOLD LABATT AUGUST 22ND THAT PARTY
OFFICIALS WERE "SYMPATHETIC" TO LOWE'S ACTION AND FELT
THERE WAS NO OTHER COURSE OPEN TO HIM EXCEPT RESIGNATION
FROM PARTY LEADERSHIP. IT WAS APPARENT IN TALKING TO
MRS. VENN THAT STATE LABOR PARTY SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT,
NEIL BATT, WOULD NOW LEAD PARTY ON COURSE DEFINITELY
MORE CONSERVATIVE AND STATE-ORIENTED THAN IT HAD BEEN
WHEN DIRECTED BY LOWE. MRS. VENN SAID ALSO, THAT
PREMIER W.A. NEILSON, WHO HAD BEEN "REDUCED TO
NERVOUS EXHAUSTION" BY RIGOURS OF PREMIERSHIP, HAD
RECEIVED A "NEW LEASE OF LIFE," AS RESULT OF CRISIS
WITH FEDERAL ALP, AND WAS NOW ACTIVELY DIRECTING STATE
AFFAIRS. THROUGH BATT, NEILSON WOULD BE MORE INVOLVED
IN PARTY AFFAIRS AS WELL. NEILSON TOLD MRS. VENN THAT
LOWE'S STATUS WITHIN STATE ALP CAUCUS HAD FALLEN TO THREE
VOTES OUT OF 23 POSSIBLE. LABATT AND CONGEN OBSERVE THAT
DEPUTY PREMIER LOWE HAS BEEN DIRECTING GOVERNMENT DURING MOST
OF PAST THREE MONTHS WHILE NEILSON HAS BEEN TAKING
SERIES OF SICK LEAVES ON QUEENSLAND RIVIERA.

4. MRS. VENN OBVIOUSLY GETS QUIET SATISFACTION OUT OF RESULTS
OF STATE PARTY BID FOR INDEPENDENCE FROM
ATTEMPTED FEDERAL CONTROL BY FEDERAL PARTY. SHE
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INDICATED THAT HARRADINE AFFAIR WAS MERELY SYMBOL OF
MORE "SINISTER" ASPECTS OF PARTY AFFAIRS. SHE SAID THAT
UNTIL FEDERAL PARTY ACTION, STATE PARTY HAD CONTEMPLATED
QUIETLY GETTING RID OF HARRADINE, AND WOULD HAVE DONE SO
IF THEY HAD BEEN GIVEN "HALF A CHANCE." HARRADINE NOW
ENJOYING INFLUENCE IN PARTY WHICH HE HAS NOT HAD FOR
MANY YEARS.

5. ALSO ON AUGUST 22ND, DENNIS HAWKER, EDITOR OF INFLUENTIAL NEWSPAPER "HOBART MERCURY," TOLD LABATT THAT LABOR PARTY IN TASMANIA SERIOUSLY POLARIZED, WITH LEFT WING ULTIMATE BENEFICIARIES OF CONFUSION. HAWKER SAID FOR GENERAL WELFARE OF STATE ACTIVITY WITHIN PARTY IS "UNFORTUNATE." LEFT WING IS ACHIEVING SUCCESS AT EXPENSE OF PARTY MODERATES WHO "HAD NOT DONE BAD JOB OF RUNNING STATE FOR NEARLY 40 YEARS," APPARENTLY WITHOUT HELP FROM FEDERAL PARTY OR CANBERRA GOVERNMENT.

6. LOWE COMMENTED TO CONGEN AUGUST 25 THAT HE HAD DECIDED TO MAINTAIN HIS POSITION AS DEPUTY PREMIER BUT THAT AS STATE ALP PRESIDENT THREE-WAY PRESSURE ON HIM FROM EXTREMES OF LEFT AND RIGHT IN TASMANIA AND FROM FEDERAL PARTY WAS INTOLERABLE. ALL THREE GROUPS WERE ATTEMPTING TO MAKE HIM THEIR PUPPET. FURTHERMORE THERE WAS A GREAT DEAL OF DEVIOUSNESS AND DOUBLE TALK BY ALL THREE GROUPS. IN THIS SITUATION, REMAINING AS EFFECTIVE STATE PARTY PRESIDENT WAS IMPOSSIBLE. EACH OF THREE PRESSURE GROUPS WAS PLAYING GAME OF ADVANCING SOMEONE'S POLITICAL AMBITIONS IN MOST DEVIOUS WAYS AND HE WAS NOT PLAYING ANY ONE OF THREE'S GAME. (FOR EXAMPLE NEIL BATT WAS POSING PUBLICLY AS GREAT DEFENDER OF HARRADINE AND FAR RIGHT BUT AT SAME TIME WAS MEETING PRIVATELY WITH FAR LEFT LEADER JOHN ROLPH TO MAKE SECRET DEALS TO BENEFIT OF BOTH.) LOWE HAD RECEIVED 60 SIGNED LETTERS OF APPRECIATION IN THIS MORNING'S MAIL FROM ALL SORTS OF PEOPLE ENDORSING HIS EXPRESSION OF PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE AND FELT THAT HIS STAND HAD BEEN THOROUGHLY VINDICATED. BY CONTINUING IN HIS CABINET POSITION AS DEPUTY PREMIER, CHIEF SECRETARY AND MINISTER FOR CONSUMER AFFAIRS, LABOR, THE PUBLIC SERVICE, PLANNING REORGANIZATION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND THE ENVIRONMENT, HE COULD REMAIN ACTIVE AND MAKE POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO TASMANIAN PROBLEMS WHILE OTHERS FOUGHT IT OUT.

7. COMMENT: LOWE'S RESIGNATION ENDS HOPES THAT HE WOULD BECOME DYNAMIC, YOUNG ALP PREMIER OF TASMANIA AT END OF 1975. CONSENSUS IN TASMANIA AND ON MAINLAND INDICATES UNIVERSAL REGRET AT THIS DAMAGE TO YOUNG, POPULAR, CAPABLE PARTY LEADER. HIS DEPARTURE FROM STATE ALP PRESIDENCY MEANS HIS MODERATE VOTE IN FEDERAL PARTY EXECUTIVE WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE REPLACED BY AN EXTREME CONSERVATIVE. ALSO TENSION BETWEEN FEDERAL AND STATE ALP WILL BE EVEN WORSE AND SOLUTION EVEN MORE DIFFICULT. END COMMENT.
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